

**Remarks of Lt. Governor Becky Skillman at the  
Hoosier Hospitality Conference  
Fort Wayne, IN  
March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2010**

Today it's my honor to welcome you—the friendly faces that greet our Indiana visitors every day.

I feel like I need to take extra care to be on my best behavior when I'm with our hospitality industry. You set the bar very high, and I hope my brand of Hoosier Hospitality meets your standards.

I can't overstate how important you are to Indiana's tourism industry. Yours is the first impression on our visitors, and often the most lasting one. If you can make people feel welcome and valued, then they will come back again and again, perhaps one day live here and move their business here. It's all connected. We can't grow Indiana tourism unless people want to be here and be a part of our Hoosier community. And we can't do that without your help.

Tourism represents a huge economic engine for our state. It's a major employer and a major investor. That's why we've made it a part of our economic development plans since 2005, and we're continuing to make it a priority.

It's no secret we've been living through tough times lately. The hospitality industry has not been immune to the difficulty we've all experienced.

But instead of giving in to the temptation to quit, you've worked harder and even better. Today, your customers are much more likely to be from a neighboring county rather than guests from far away places. But they're still coming out, still looking for good deals and still ready to enjoy world class hotels, restaurants and attractions right in their own backyards.

Indiana's tourism and hospitality industries represent a core of health in our economy, and you're part of the reason we can see signs that the economy is improving. That doesn't mean all our problems are going to be taken care of overnight. There are still a lot of Hoosier families that are struggling.

In your work in the tourism industry, you know best that a recession affects everyone. Some businesses will falter, possibly fail, but others will come out stronger on the other side. I can assure you, the same will be true for states. And we plan to make this a recession of opportunity.

The challenges we have before us now, are merely disguised opportunities – to innovate, be creative, seek out new partnerships that will move us forward and make us prosper.

Just consider our Office of Tourism Development. Budget cuts throughout state government, particularly in advertising, have hurt this office more than most, but we've found ways to thrive.

Since most of us start our vacation plans online today, we've refocused our efforts and made the internet our best tool to attract visitors. Close to 75 percent of the people who are planning trips start online. And we have a top notch website to catch the tourist's eye.

We also recently won a national award for e-mail marketing. These business-to-consumer e-mails come at no cost to the taxpayer and provide information on trip ideas, discounts, and festivals that you – our industry partners – provide.

Our website, at VisitIndiana.com does an excellent job of promoting the great value of vacations and getaways close to home. People still want to travel, despite tighter budgets, and we're helping them find the perfect fit for their getaway – whether they're looking for excitement or relaxation.

On the website, we have hundreds of travel packages that will show visitors the wonderful variety of Hoosier destinations. Hopefully you are part of those lists and packages. And if you aren't, we'd love to add you!

Although it hasn't been easy, our state is a beacon of fiscal stability in America's economic storm, and even we have taken a few hits as we attempt to maintain our strength. Even with all the efficiencies created, and reductions in state agency budgets, you might say the hard work is just beginning.

We may actually have less money to work with when we adopt the budget in 2011 than we had in 2006. But we have already made a commitment to live within our means, and not raise taxes.

We know that low taxes are precisely what have kept us so strong for so long. The Tax Foundation ranked Indiana as 12<sup>th</sup> best state for business tax last year – up from 14<sup>th</sup> in 2008 – and in each year we were best in the Midwest.

Indiana is one of very few states that hasn't raised taxes since the beginning of the recession. We took a different approach, working on ways to tighten our belts not ways to squeeze more dollars out of Hoosier families, dollars they would rather spend on family leisure and travel.

In 2009, CEO's from across the country named Indiana as the most business-friendly state in the Midwest, and one of the best in the nation.

Despite the recession, last year our state's Economic Development Corporation exceeded expectations. The state has sealed deals with more than 150 businesses statewide that have committed nearly 20,000 new jobs. I will admit the amount of the private capital investment is far less than the previous year, but that is due in large part to the increase of consolidations we've won.

Indiana won 48 competitive consolidations in 2009, where national or international companies saw the need to consolidate, then chose Indiana as the best place for the streamlined operation.

This continues to be a difficult period in our national economy. But I'm confident, when we have finally passed through it, Indiana will be well positioned to surge forward once again, small towns on par with big cities. The tourism industry is doing a lot to help us realize that goal.

In 2010 there are more reasons than ever to visit and explore – and spend money! – in Indiana. There are new cheetah cubs at the Indy Zoo and jaguar cubs at the Mesker Park Zoo in Evansville. We also have several unique inns and hotels that have opened up across the state. And Holiday World is continuing to expand and invest in southern Indiana. They have a new water ride, the Wildebeast, which is sure to attract a lot of visitors.

And here in Fort Wayne, the Museum of Art has been renovating and expanding giving visitors another reason to make Allen County their drive-to destinations.

We've also been blessed with two great Lincoln exhibits, one is now part of the permanent collection at the State Museum. We owe a debt of gratitude to Ft. Wayne for helping us keep that exhibit in the state. It was once housed here, and I understand even the Smithsonian was anxious to get it. But thankfully, now that national treasure is still in Indiana.

Our Office of Tourism Development is devoted to promoting the state's many attractions, and encouraging growth in new areas. I can tell you that Amy Vaughan and her staff are excited about the future and the opportunity to grow this industry.

And it's because of you that we're confident that first time visitors will turn into annual guests.

Going out of your way to assist guests leaves such an incredible impression on visitors to our state. Your actions speak louder than any thing we could say about our attractions, hotels and restaurants.

I have traveled all around this state, and I have been so impressed with the professionals in our tourism industry. There are literally thousands of you who are doing an extraordinary job every day.

Thanks for all you do for Indiana, and thanks for having me today.

*Note: Lt. Governor Becky Skillman ended her remarks by presenting a Partner in Progress Award to Dan O'Connell, President and CEO of the Ft. Wayne/Allen County CVB in honor of his leadership in the tourism industry. To learn more about the Partner in Progress award visit [Lt. Governor Skillman's website](#).*